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ABSTRACT

Factors that contribute to the success of an educational consultant and the school partnership were studied through a qualitative exploration of the consultant's role in two reform efforts. The study explored the work of one educational consultant in two school districts, one in which the consultant had been working for 27 years and one in which she had been working for less than 2 years. Both districts were in upscale suburbs of New York City. Two distinct models emerged from the study data, one was referred to as consultant-as-voice and the other as client-as-voice. In the consultant-as-voice model, the consultant worked directly with the participants, usually with the client present. In the client-as-voice mode, she worked directly with the client, usually in the absence of the other participants, to build capacity in the client in both content and process. The consultant's success depended on her ability to overcome any negative influence of the site-specific factors studied (principal, internal facilitator, clarity of reform goals, organizational culture, and knowledge of the change process) and to capitalize on positive site factors. Findings emphasize the importance of values shared between consultant and client, especially the importance of these values in the selection of the consultant. Findings also support the literature regarding the importance of the principal in school reform. (Contains 6 figures and 51 references.) (SLD)

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Maximizing the Effectiveness of External Consultants in the Educational Reform Agenda

by
Nancy Sulla
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INNOVATIVE DESIGNS FOR EDUCATION

Educational reform initiatives of the 1990s are characterized by the call for a complete reworking of the educational system and a rejection of the tinkering that was characteristic of earlier reform movements (Deal, 1990; Murphy, 1991; Shanker, 1992). The history of educational reform is littered with failed and limitedly-successful reform efforts. "There should be a page in the *Guinness Book of Records* on failed classroom reforms, for few ever seem to have been incorporated into teachers' repertoires" (Cuban, 1988, p.6). Second-order change efforts – those which "alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together, including new goals, structures, and roles" (Fullan, 1991, p. 29) – have met with little success due, in part, to the failure of reformers to recognize the systemic nature of second-order change (Cuban, 1988). Systemic change requires reformers to view schools as complex, multifaceted organizations in which one area is affected by and has an effect on every other area (Garmston & Wellman, 1995).

In an effort to achieve systemic educational reform, schools increasingly are turning to outside consultants for assistance (Fullan, 1991; Sarason, 1990). Although some resist the use of external consultants for reasons of pride and expense (Wagner, 1994), schools are following the trends of corporate America, finding that "the additional expense is more than offset by substantial improvements in both the speed and effectiveness of their change process (p. 266)". External expert assistance is often a crucial element of successful school improvement projects" (Hamann, 1992, p. 2). The nature of schools is such that teachers and principals are ensnared by the day-to-day operations and therefore focus more on maintaining the organization than on changing it (Fullan, 1991; Hamann, 1992; Lortie, 1975). The knowledge and processes necessary to bring about reform must therefore be found outside the school (Firestone & Corbett, 1987). External consultants have a greater chance of bringing about reform than those within the organization because of the lack of bureaucratization in the role and resulting flexibility (Louis, 1981). Unhindered by the daily operations level, they can help the district stay focused on and committed to the reform process, resulting in the greater likelihood of institutionalization of the innovation (Louis, 1981). Given the difficult and sometimes traumatic nature of change, an external consultant can be an effective helper in making the process easier. To use Donahoe's (1993) analogy, "Like rebar in concrete, [an external consultant] keeps the process from cracking and crumbling" (p. 300). "Not to seek any outside help is to be more self-sufficient than the demands of educational change would allow" (Fullan, 1991, p. 225).

Yet in spite of the widespread use of external consultants in the reform process, school officials continue to operate absent of any national, state, or local policy regarding the hiring or use of consultants (Berg, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Hamman, 1992). Educational consulting is a relatively young profession in the history of education. Cocking (1956) referred to educational consulting as a new profession that lacked any definition of the expected activities, competences, or qualifications of the consultant and recommended that state and national administrative associations immediately begin to conduct research in the area of consulting. In spite of this plea, research in the field was sparse as of the 1960's (Anton, 1964), the 1980's (Berg, 1988; Stevens, 1983), and the 1990's (Fullan, 1991; Hamman, 1992). Yet, increasingly, schools are turning to external consultants to assist in the reform process (Fullan, 1991; Louis, 1981), and research on school reform supports the use of external consultants as being critical to successfully achieving reform goals (Estes, 1995; Firestone & Corbett, 1987; Fullan, 1991; Hamman, 1992.)

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The use of external consultants to impart knowledge or to assess programs or schools has been heavily criticized in recent years for being ineffective because these approaches largely ignore the impact of the local context on reform and assume that solutions to educational dilemmas can be imported (Crandall et al., 1982; Goodman, 1994; McLaughlin, 1990). Hope lies in the effective use of external consultants who work within the local context and partner with the local stakeholders to effect meaningful, lasting change (Goodman, 1994; Hamman, 1992; McLaughlin, 1990).

For schools to achieve substantive reform through the effective use of external consultants, both the schools and the consultants need to have a clear understanding of the factors that contribute to the success of the consultant and school partnership. "The 'thick descriptions' necessary for understanding the complex and interactive nature of the restructuring processes and the hard data needed for informed decision making in schools contemplating restructuring initiatives are noticeably lacking (Prestine & Bowen, 1992, p. 298). Given that no clear guidelines exist for hiring and using external consultants, in many cases, external consultants are poorly used (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977).

The success of external consultants in assisting organizations in the pursuit of reform has been strongly linked to their ability to recognize and interact with the local context, rather than taking a one-solution-fits-all approach (Berman & McLaughlin, 1980; Guskey, 1995; Prestine & Bowen, 1993). Research literature on the effectiveness of external consultants in effecting second-order change supports this contextual approach, identifying several factors critical to success: the extent to which the consultant takes into account the local context, the ability of the consultant to help the client engage in reflective inquiry, and the processes that the consultant uses (Hamann, 1992; Johnston, 1989; McDonald, 1989; McLaughlin, 1990; Schein, 1969).

Although existing studies offer insights into successful consulting roles and techniques, much remains to be discovered about the factors that lead to a successful partnership between the consultant and the district in the pursuit of second-order change that will bring about instructional reform. As organizations, schools are "non linear systems that change radically with the folding and refolding of feedback into themselves" (Garmston & Wellman, 1995, p. 10). "We must learn to embrace complexity in human organizations. We must seek patterns of order beneath the surface chaos and search for structures and patterns of interaction that release and amplify the energies within the system" (Senge, 1990, p. 10). It may be that the most effective way of studying the work of an external consultant is through a systems lens.

As an educational consultant whose primary source of income is from partnering with districts over a period of years to effect meaningful, lasting, second-order change, it is reasonable to expect that I would be interested in learning more about building successful client / consultant relationships that result in substantive change. The challenge that lay before me was to design a study that would apply a systems approach to uncovering the complexities of the change process and the work of the consultant, yet withstand the scrutiny of those positivists who have little regard for any methods of inquiry that do not employ prediction, explanation, and technical control.

Theoretical Framework

Upon embarking on this research challenge, I realized that the quantitative methods valued by many would not suffice in embracing the messiness of the consulting

process. My emphasis was on discovery rather than proof (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994), on "understanding through looking closely at people's words, actions and records" (p. 17). The goal was to discover the effect of contextual, that is, site-specific, factors on the work of the consultant. Data collection and analysis were guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the consultant and those in the district perceive the role of the consultant in bringing about second-order change that leads to instructional reform?
2. In what ways do site-specific factors – the role of the principal, the internal facilitator, the organizational culture, clarity of reform goals, and a working knowledge of the change process by those within the organization – affect the work of the consultant in the pursuit of second-order change that leads to instructional reform?
3. How does the consultant interact with the site-specific factors to maximize success?
4. What happens relative to the reform effort between the consultant's on-site visits?

Research literature identifies several critical factors in the pursuit of educational reform: organizational culture (Berg, 1988; Bolman & Deal, 1991; Guskey, 1995; Saphier & King, 1985); the internal players, such as the principal (Donahoe, 1993; DuFour and Eaker, 1992; Firestone & Corbett, 1987; Sarason, 1982) and the internal facilitator (Bassin & Gross, 1980; Cox, 1983a; Fullan, 1991); clarity of reform goals (Fullan, 1991; Hamman, 1992; Miles & Louis, 1990); and knowledge of the change process (Fullan, 1991; Havelock, 1995; Miles, 1981; Sarason, 1982). These factors are described, studied, and discussed independently; yet it may be in their interrelatedness that successful reform efforts emerge (Bassin & Gross, 1980; Cox, 1983b; Estes, 1995).

Although these factors are evident in all schools engaged in reform, the particular interplay among these factors that is unique to the site and the effect of such interrelationships on the work of the external consultant is the focus of this study. Guided by the research questions, I viewed the work of the external consultant in the context of the interrelationships of these variables. Figure 1 offers a graphical representation of the work of the external consultant from a systems perspective. Applying systems thinking, each factor included has an interdependent relationship with every other factor. This approach yields 30 one-to-one relationships to be studied. Taking into account relationships involving multiple factors, the scope of the potential study widens considerably. This study, therefore, focused on the interrelationships that most directly involved the work of the external consultant.

Figure 2, a modified version of Figure 1, represents the conceptual framework of this study. The remaining lines represent those relationships and the related interrelationships that received considerable attention throughout the study. The researcher acknowledges the existence of the other relationships; however these relationships fall outside the boundaries of the study and, although they were included in the data collection and subsequent analysis, they did not receive deliberate attention.

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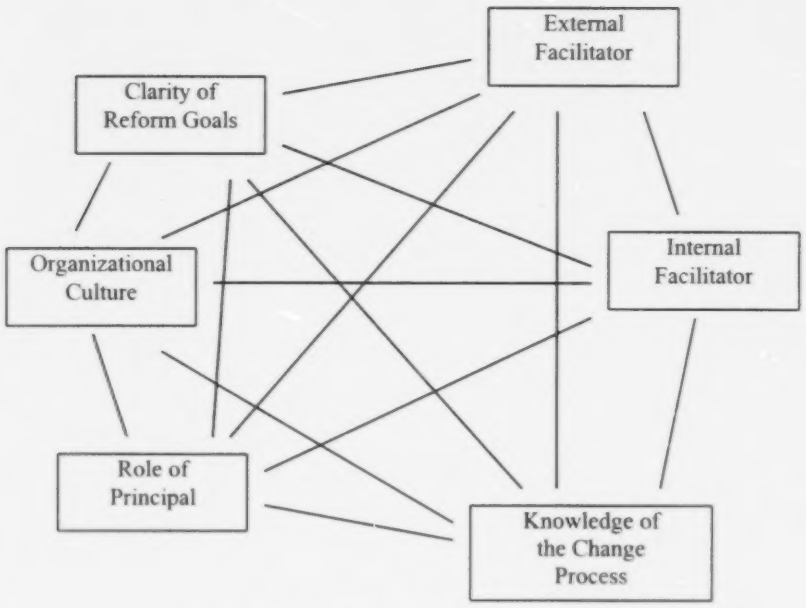

Figure 1 - Site-Specific Factors that Affect the Work of the External Consultant

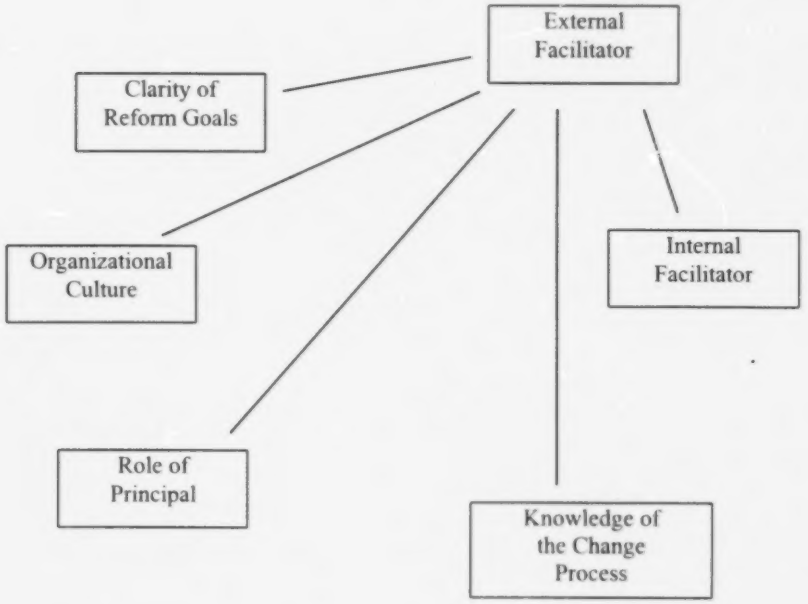

Figure 2 - Site-Specific Factors Included in This Study

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Data Collection

The study explored the work of one consultant in two school districts, both attempting to bring about reform of practices related to learning and instruction. The consultant had been involved in the field of education since 1970 and had been working as a consultant to schools since 1981. I selected her based on the following six criteria: Her consulting work was restricted to education; her work in the selected districts was focused on bringing about change in those areas that affect the instruction of students; her work in the selected districts was long term, meaning that she would probably be working in the districts for a period of years; she had a national reputation as a successful educational consultant; she was an independent consultant, not affiliated with any universities or organizations bringing about change in schools; and she was paid by the school district for her services. The consultant was recommended to me by several other consultants and was described in a journal article as a successful change agent. She described herself as a systems consultant, one who "looks at the part in relation to the whole … looks at the whole picture of independent parts … and is interested in knowing the parts as they relate to the issue [she is] called in to work with." She is nationally recognized for her work in assessment, thinking, and school restructuring and has published articles, books, and products to promote improvement of student performance. She has a background in cognitive psychology and possesses a breadth of content knowledge in addition to a keen understanding of the processes and strategies needed to move people in new directions.

Some may argue that the study of a single consultant will not produce data sufficient to answer the research questions. Were the purpose of the study to prove a hypothesis, this would be true; however, the purpose of this study was to shed light on the consulting process to better inform both school districts and external consultants as they engage in work similar to the context of the subjects of this study. My goal was to increase understanding through the accumulation of sufficient knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and focusing the study on one consultant therefore increased the validity of the study. Although studying two, four, or ten consultants may have been enticing; the number of consultants I would have been able to study using the proposed methods, and still live to write about it, would not have produced a value of "n" large enough to claim any generalizations. The recent increase in the use of ethnographic methods has "remade the contemporary view of education and schooling" (Alkin, 1992, p. 460). "On many fronts, we are finding rejection of those perspectives in social sciences which reduce human beings to mere quantities, to movable and interchangeable parts in the system" (Starratt, 1993, p. 29). This emerging view of educational research focuses on human interaction, holism, symbolic interactions, and deep belief structures: aspects of education that may be best studied through qualitative methods, which seek to provide rich, thick descriptions from which recurring themes emerge. I therefore opted to follow in the footsteps of qualitative researchers who have pursued depth over breadth.

The work of a single external consultant was studied in two different districts: one in which the consultant had been working for 7 years and one in which she had been working for less than 2 years. The Coalition District (pseudonyms will be used to ensure confidentiality), located in an upscale suburb of New York City, serves approximately 1,200 kindergarten through 12th-grade students in three schools. Seven years prior to the study, the high school faculty voted to become a member of the Coalition of Essential

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Schools. The Coalition of Essential Schools is an organization affiliated with Brown University. Based on a set of nine Common Principles that emerged from Theodore Sizer's (Sizer, 1992) studies of effective schools, the Coalition seeks to provide schools with a framework for reform and affiliations to support reform. Three years after this decision, the high school principal became the superintendent of schools. Subsequently, the middle school and elementary school also adopted the principles of the Coalition. The high school had been involved in various related reform projects and had been the subject of prior research studies. The school had utilized the services of consultants from both the University community and the private sector. The consultant began her work assisting the high school in realizing the principles of the Coalition. Within 2 years, her work extended to the district level.

The New District, located in another upscale suburb of New York City, serves approximately 2,000 kindergarten through 12th-grade students. The district received the New York Excelsior Award for quality in the workplace and placed second in the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. They raised the number of Regent's Diplomas – those based on achievement of state-wide standards for college-bound students – granted from 30% to 64% in 5 years. The consultant began working with the Director of Curriculum on district-wide projects a year and a half prior to this study.

This contrast of sites based on length of the consulting relationship allowed the researcher to explore the interrelationships between a consultant and the site-specific factors in both the beginning stages of the consulting process and the latter stages. Additionally, the study contrasted the more intensive work of a consultant in Coalition District, where she spent approximately 2 days each month, with the more removed work of the consultant in New District, where she had planned to spend approximately 4 days during the year.

Qualitative inquiry must be "grounded in the empirical world under study … the minute-by-minute, day-to-day social life of individuals as they interact together, as they develop understandings and meanings" (Woods, 1992, p. 349). I observed the consultant by spending 8 full days on site with her across five months, shadowing her and taking notes that described the situation, her actions, the actions of the clients, her words, and the words of the clients. Observations focused on the interactions of the external consultant with the principal and the internal facilitator, if other than the principal; those actions and words that represented the motivation for reform; and those actions and words that indicated the level of awareness of the change process held by the people. I conducted four formal interviews and many informal interviews with the consultant at various times throughout the study. At the Coalition District, formal and informal interviews were also arranged with the superintendent, school principals, high school assistant principal, and a number of teachers. At New District, formal and informal interviews were arranged with the Director of Curriculum, a principal, and several teachers. Interview questions focused on the working relationship between the informant and the consultant, the role of the consultant as perceived by the informant, how the informant measured the success of the consultant in her work, and the internal factors that emerged throughout the study as affecting the work of the consultant.

I collected and reviewed documents that offered a perspective of the culture of the school and the work of the consultant. These included school handbooks, public relations brochures, news articles, transcripts of Coalition superintendent's speech, journal articles

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written by informants, notes, action research proposals, letters, memos, and electronic mail. I collected these items in hopes of finding patterns that emerged that supported the data gathered through interviews and observations.

Findings - Recursion

What emerged from the data was a recursive application of seven phases of the consulting process. The phases (Figure 3) were evident in each instance in which the consultant actively interacted with her clients and are described as follows:

Entry – the activities associated with the consultant gaining access to and being accepted by the individuals with whom she would be consulting.

Problem-Translation – the activities associated with clarifying and articulating the problem.

Focus – the activities associated with identifying a goal or direction for the consulting work.

Structure-Building – the activities associated with the creation and identification of structures within which the participants could work toward their goals.

Teams-and-Resources – the activities associated with linking participants to human and non-human resources upon which they might draw for inspiration, knowledge, ideas, support, critique, and energy.

Implementation – the activities associated with enabling participants to purposefully and deliberately maintain and sustain the change.

Institutionalization – the point at which the change is sustained without conscious effort.

Figure 3 – Seven Phases of the Consulting Process

The existence of these phases could have been predicted from Havelock's (1995) identification of seven stages of change. Havelock referred to these stages as being part of a reiterative cycle of change. Unexpected in this study was the subtle departure from the more anticipated iteration of the phases to a recursive application.

The differences between iteration and recursion lie in the starting and ending points of the process in question, in this case, the full completion of the seven phases, referred to as the consulting cycle. An iterative process would mean that one instance of the consulting cycle is completed from start to finish before a second instance is begun. The consultant would, in effect, systematically move through the seven phases toward a specific objective and then begin another cycle. Through the repeated application of the cycle, the larger reform goal would be achieved. A recursive process would mean that in the midst of one cycle, it becomes evident that another cycle is required to achieve the objective. The first cycle suspends while a new cycle is initiated on a subset objective or group of participants. Upon the completion of this second cycle, the first cycle can successfully continue to completion. Recursive processes rarely involve only two instances of the cycle and are therefore sometimes a challenge to track.

Thinking of the reform process and the activities of the consultant from an iterative perspective assumes viewing reform as a series of small building blocks that will eventually create a greater whole. The assumption is that if one identifies a plan for reform and begins to bring about change in small places, greater reform will occur. To extend the iteration model to the greater reform conversation, a grassroots reform effort in one district would eventually lead to worldwide reform. It may be, however, that the issues that affect larger reform are not evident when one addresses the smaller subset.

Viewing the reform process and consulting activities from a recursive perspective assumes beginning with a larger reform goal and working toward that end. Issues surrounding the breadth of the process are considered at the outset. Immediately, due to this breadth, the participants are faced with obstacles that would prevent the easy attainment of the goal. The obstacle moves the participants to identify a subset of the larger goal and begin the process at that level prior to returning to complete the process at the greatest level. Most probably, upon initiation of the next cycle, the participants will be presented with another obstacle, forcing the process to a lower level. The initial cycle is not completed until all subsequent recursive instances are completed.

The following incident described in the data of this study depicts the recursive nature of the work of the consultant in bringing about change (see Figure 4). Data were collected at the Coalition District through formal interviews with the consultant, superintendent of schools, middle school principal, and teachers; on-site observations of two full-group meetings and two meetings between individual teachers and the consultant; and an internally developed document provided by the reading teacher entitled, "Action research Proposal."

The goal of the consulting process, and thus the first consulting cycle, was to improve the image of the school district, in response to parent concerns. Through this consulting cycle, the focus was placed on raising academic standards at the middle school level and the structure-building phase forced the consultant to begin a second consulting cycle at the middle school, where she began with gaining entry. Thus, the first consulting cycle (improving the district's image) was temporarily suspended while this new recursive cycle began.

The focus in the second cycle was placed on the improvement of the reading program and the structure-building phase forced the consultant to suspend the second consulting cycle and begin a third consulting cycle with those responsible for the reading program.

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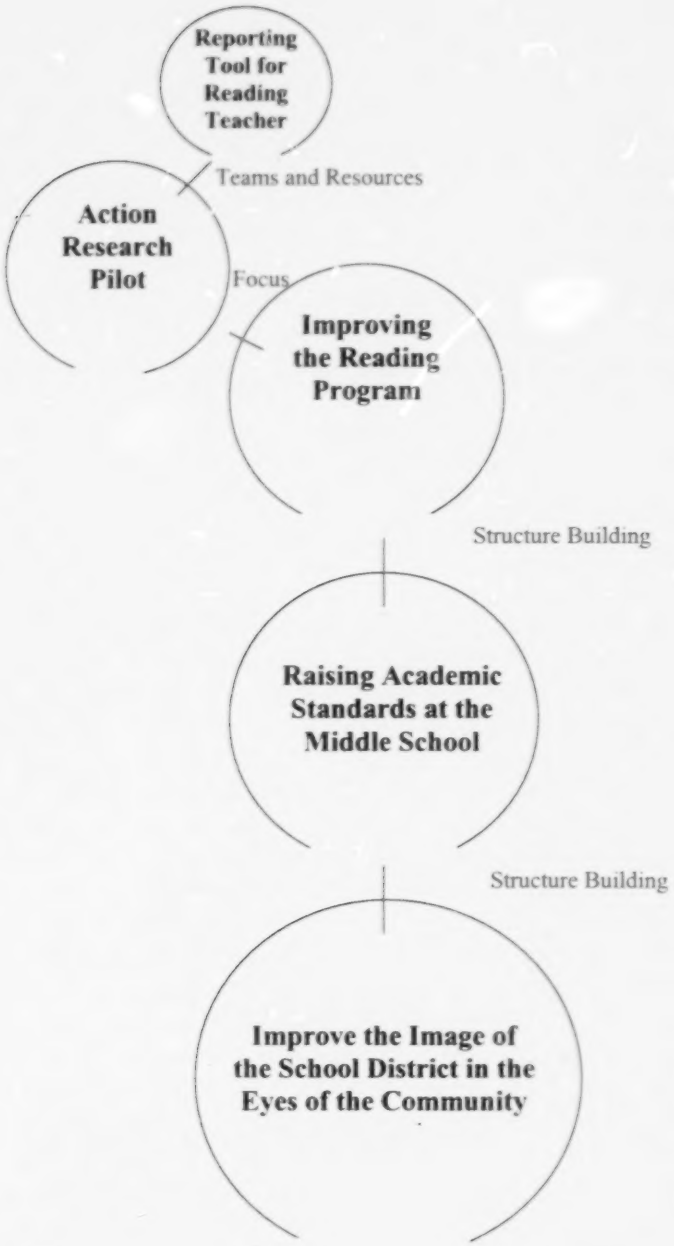
Reporting Tool for Reading Teacher
Teams and Resources
Action Research Pilot
Focus
Improving the Reading Program
Structure Building
Raising Academic Standards at the Middle School
Structure Building
Improve the Image of the School District in the Eyes of the Community

Figure 4 – Reading Program Improvement

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During the focus phase of the third cycle, where the participants would have to focus on an aspect of the program needing improvement, they decided to engage in an action research project to identify necessary program modifications. Facilitating the development and implementation of an action research project became the consultant's initiation of a fourth consulting cycle.

The consultant met with a subset group of administrators and teachers to help them develop an action research proposal to present to the full group. During the meeting, the English teachers expressed concern that activities in the reading class and the English class overlapped. As discussion ensued, the consultant realized that the teachers were more likely to blame one another than develop a plan to jointly improve the program. In particular, the teachers were very critical of the reading specialist and did not respect her professionally. They verbally criticized the data she was collecting on students and how she reported their performance. Acceptance of the reading teacher by the rest of the teachers was critical to improving the school's reading program. The consultant created an opportunity during the teams-and-resources phase for the reading teacher to collect data on the action research pilot. This required the consultant to work more closely with the reading specialist to develop the necessary data collection tools and thus initiated a fifth instance of the consulting cycle.

In working with the reading specialist, the consultant was able to convince her to gather data on the students that would meet the scrutiny of her colleagues and better position her professionally among her colleagues. Upon completion of this fifth level, that is, when the teacher was at a point of accepting and implementing new techniques for collecting data on students, attention returned to the fourth level, continued implementing an action research project. Upon completion of the action research project and evidence of success with a new model for the reading program, attention returned to the third level, improvement of the reading program. In this case, the work done at the lower recursive levels was foundational for improving the reading program. Once the new program was successfully in place (not realized by the conclusion of this study), the work would return to the second recursive level, improving academic standards at the middle school. Once all related initiatives were completed, work would return to the first level, improving the district's image. If the middle school reading program turned out to be the only necessary focus, the goal would be accomplished. Otherwise, other consulting cycles would have to be completed to reach the goal.

Findings – Consulting Models

Two distinct consulting models emerged from the data in this study, herein referred to as consultant-as-voice and client-as-voice (see Figure 5). In the following descriptions, the term "client" refers to the person most responsible for the particular reform initiative in each situation; the term "participants" refers to all those involved in the effort.

During the researcher's observations, the consultant asked the administrator, prior to any meetings with teachers or community members, to give her some background and explain what they wanted to accomplish. Through this preliminary discussion, she became aware of her clients' goals. In the consultant-as-voice model, she worked directly with the participants, usually with the client present, as an outside expert bringing expertise in both content and process. In the client-as-voice model, she worked

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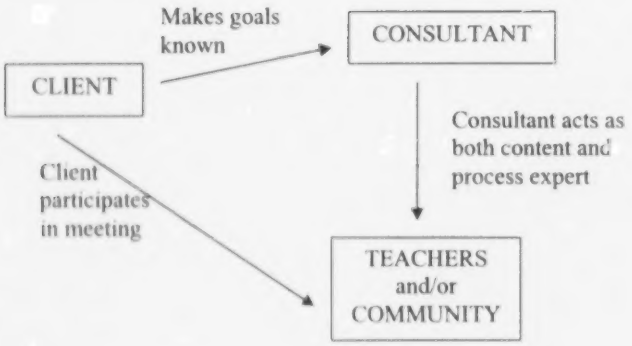
Consultant-as-Voice



Client-as-Voice

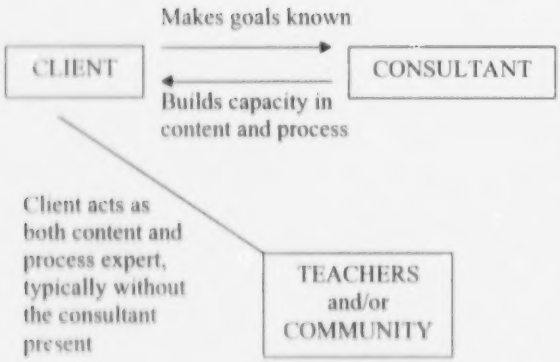

Makes goals known
CLIENT
CONSULTANT
Builds capacity in content and process
Client acts as both content and process expert, typically without the consultant present
TEACHERS and/or COMMUNITY

Figure 5 - Consulting Models

directly with the client, usually absent of the other participants, to build capacity in the client in both content and process to allow the client to work with the participants toward the reform goal.

When using the consultant-as-voice model, the consultant offered expertise, advice, and content knowledge. One principal explained, "In my head I knew [what I wanted to happen,] but I knew it just couldn't come from me. So I brought [the consultant] in to work with the teachers."

Another principal described a situation in which she wanted to reform the science program but didn't feel she knew enough about science. She wanted to make sure that options presented by the science teachers were in line with current research about the teaching of science. "I wasn't a science teacher so I wanted to get the advise of an expert." She used a science consultant to work alone with her. The personal use of a consultant allowed her to continue to be the voice of authority while ensuring that she

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was speaking from a level of expertise. Capturing the essence of the two models, she explained, "Sometimes I use consultants publicly, sometimes I use them privately."

The consultant was careful not to set the direction for reform. "You have to be careful not to be the messenger. You can represent authority, but you can't be authority." Her philosophy was evident in that, during meetings with teachers and community members, she often deferred to the principal or internal facilitator on questions about the direction of the reform effort

The consultant-as-voice model was prevalent throughout the various entry phases of the consulting process. Although the informants who brought the consultant into both districts agreed that the consultant would bring an expertise that did not exist in the district, their emphasis was on the use of an outside voice to push the reform agenda. As one client explained, "She'll understand your direction and try to be another voice in your effort to make change."

Findings – Shared Values

The existence of shared values between the consultant and the client emerged as an important early indicator of a working relationship that led to successful reform efforts. In some cases, these values already existed; in other cases, they came to be shared over time. Although interviews with the consultant and her clients indicated that shared values were not articulated or discussed during her entry to the district, the data indicated that, in some instances, the client or the consultant had a sense that they did possess a set of shared values. Prior to the consultant's entry into Coalition District, the superintendent had attended a workshop with the consultant. Her description of that day, "I just knew that our thinking was absolutely in line," indicated her sense that she consultant might share a set of core values about teaching and learning.

One incident described through interviews, observations, and an action research project illustrated how, without shared values between the consultant and the client, the reform initiative can falter. A high school teacher was described by the principal as not "buying into" the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools." The principal explained that she "got him to agree to meet with [the consultant] to help us develop an action research project around detracking his English class." In spite of their joint development of an innovative program and his voiced agreement in the process, the result of his action research project indicated that the program was not working and that advanced students were not feeling challenged. Student responses to writing prompts reflected the teacher's beliefs. The teacher maintained that advanced students should be instructed separately to prepare them for college, a belief not shared by the consultant or principal. He redesigned the course, taught it, and provided the data to prove that the method did not work. According to the consultant, she "I reviewed the videotapes he made of his classes for the action research project. He was giving the kids messages that it's not working. It was so clear in the tapes, things he said, ways he acted."

In no instance in this study or in the consultant's accounts of other districts did the consultant overcome the absence of shared values to work effectively with participants. She explained, "I have a series of questions that I ask new clients to determine the extent to which we do share values and beliefs about teaching, learning, and change. If I don't think we're a fit, I might not take the job."

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Findings – The Effect of the Site Specific Factors

The site-specific factors identified in this study had different effects on the consultant's work depending on the consulting phase. Figure 6 summarizes the related findings. In this study, the role of the principal emerged as an extremely important factor, supporting Donahoe's (1993) findings that, in addition to the change agent, the principal plays a critical role in school reform. Together, the principal and consultant grappled with issues related to other site-specific factors; without a strong leader who was supportive of reform, the work of the consultant stopped.

The role of the internal facilitator was crucial to coordinating and continuing the work in the absence of the consultant. Although it would be possible to have someone other than the principal be the internal facilitator at the school level, in the sites included in this study, this was not the case. Therefore, it was difficult to separate the role of principal from the role of internal facilitator at the school level.

Organizational culture and clarity of reform goals appeared to be interdependent in this study. Where organizational culture was strong, clarity of reform goals was strong; where organizational culture was weak, clarity of reform goals was weak.

A working knowledge of the change process was most important in the principal and internal facilitator. More importantly, the ability of the principal or internal facilitator to ensure that their actions were consistent with theory was critical.

This study sought to explore how the consultant interacted with the site-specific factors to maximize success. Within a worksession, the consultant created graphic representations, linked participants to others, planted ideas in one setting to be developed in later settings, and carefully and deliberately articulated what participants were saying. The consultant coached the reform leader on how to support her work and the reform process. The two work models, consultant-as-voice and client-as-voice, allowed the consultant to maximize her effectiveness. The use of recursive instances of the consulting process allowed the consultant to move beyond the challenge of changing large groups and the obstacles that were presented along the way.

The study sought to investigate what happened in the district between the consultant's visits to maximize her effectiveness. Maximizing consultant effectiveness between visits depended on two critical factors: the effectiveness of the consultant to develop structures that made sense to the participants and the role of the internal facilitator. If the consultant laid out a clear picture of what had to happen between visits, the likelihood of it happening increased. In this study, the consultant took notes and offered them to the client. She provided models to be implemented, for example, the cognitive coaching process; a framework for an action research project; and tools for data collection, reflection, or action. Leaving the clients with something to do increased their capacity to have something new to share on the next visit. In cases in which participants were resistant to change, the additional pressure and support of an internal facilitator helped to keep the change process moving. Internal facilitators used faculty meetings to focus on reform issues, held individual meetings, made classroom visits, and so forth.

In cases in which the consultant encountered problems related to the site-specific factors, she drew upon a wealth of strategies to bring about change. She switched between the consultant-as-voice and client-as-voice models as needed to handle difficult situations. Obstacles in a consulting cycle often caused her to move the reform effort to deeper recursive levels.

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Phase	Challenge	Effect of Site-Specific Factors	Consulting Strategies and Techniques
Entry	To gain acceptance as a partner in a problem-solving process	Success depended upon shared values; principal set tone for reform and use of consultant	Context-oriented workshops used to gain entry to the district; internal facilitator provided access to teachers
Problem-Translation	To get participants to realize the need for real change	Made easier by high degree of clarity of goals and strong organizational culture; internal facilitator helped; weak culture led to lack of focus	Recursive cycles helped to overcome negative effects of site-specific factors; use of student work helped define problems
Focus	To get the participant to focus on one manageable aspect of the reform initiative	Clarity of goals and organizational culture were very important in this phase	Recursive cycles helped to overcome negative effects of site-specific factors
Structure-Building	To develop a structure that the client can implement	Not particularly affected; internal facilitator may make structures mandates	Direct work with principal or internal facilitator on strategies
Teams-and-Resources	To provide client with ample human and non-human resources to build confidence, knowledge, and skills	Principal and internal facilitator can help build and maintain teams and provide resources to support the process; negative local climate can affect team-building	Recursive consulting cycles can build teams in bad climate
Implementation	To ensure that the structures are put into place, troubleshoot problems, and support internal facilitator	Principal and internal facilitator play critical roles in supporting the process; phase affected when underlying beliefs are inconsistent with reform effort	Direct work with principal or internal facilitator on strategies; recursive consulting cycles; different consulting models ("voices")
Institutionalization	To ensure that the process does not end prematurely; ensure that clients can carry on without consultant	Change in principals during critical period slows progress; phase affected when underlying beliefs are inconsistent with reform effort	Strategies to shift authority to internal players

Figure 6 – The Effect of Site Specific Factors on the Work of the Consultant

Conclusions

The consultant's success depended upon her ability to overcome any negative influence of the site-specific factors and to capitalize on their positive influence. Each of the site-specific factors (the principal, the internal facilitator, clarity of reform goals, organizational culture, and knowledge of the change process) had an effect on the work of the consultant and each had to be addressed accordingly, as described in Figure 5.

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The principal was a key factor in a successful reform process. The effect the school principal had on the consultant's work was more evident during the initial stages of the consulting process when she needed to gain entry to the participants and help them translate the problem and establish a focus.

Without a good internal facilitator, the reform process could lose momentum. Given the nature of systems consulting in which the consultant is infrequently on site, the internal facilitator is crucial in maintaining the reform effort.

A strong culture may be necessary for reform, but it can be built. A principal who is a strong leader may be able to work with a consultant to bring about a change in culture; a weak organizational culture would not necessarily thwart the efforts of the consultant, but it would require a greater consulting effort than in a district where organizational culture was strong.

A working knowledge of the change process was most important in the principal and internal facilitator, however, it was not so much the knowledge of the change process that was critical as was the ability of the principal or internal facilitator to internalize this knowledge. The consultant can teach the principal or internal facilitator that, for example, change must be viewed as a process and not as an event (Fullan, 1991). However, if the person cannot understand, internalize, and act in ways that are consistent with this knowledge, the work of the consultant will be negatively affected.

It became evident through this study that the consultant was most effective in situations where the consultant and client shared a core set of values. This set of shared values contributed to the client's ability to learn from the consultant whatever was necessary to be a strong leader, be an effective facilitator, build a strong culture, develop a clarity of goals, or understand the change process.

Implications for Educational Reform

Perhaps the failure of so many attempts at broad educational reform lies in reformers' view of an organization as an essentially static, unyielding mass of independent parts and the view of change as a series of cause-and-effect relationships. Given this perspective, one could predict that providing better training for teachers would improve classroom instruction and therefore improve student achievement. Such linear, single-aspect reform efforts have not proven to be successful (Fullan, 1992).

Peter Senge (1990) expanded the view of the organization to one that is not static, but continually learning, one not connected by linear lines of function, but by webs of interconnected relationships. His view of change is not as a series of cause-and-effect relationships, but as an interconnected collection of feedback loops. Margaret Wheatley (1992) wrote of organizations as being self-renewing, dynamic, adaptive, and creative, with the best having a fractal quality in which every aspect of the organization resembles the whole, based on underlying values.

These views of organizations have implications for the methods through which reformers seek to change them. It may be that the immovable, unchangeable picture of an educational organization is short sighted. Perhaps organizations have the ability to consume positive change efforts and return the organization to a prior state. Consider the metaphor of the flatworm with its ability to regenerate lost parts. Changes to any part of the system cause a state of disequilibrium throughout the system, and the appropriate energies are applied by the system to return it to equilibrium. The adaptive nature of

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organizations may allow the organization to absorb the impact of external change without affecting its foundational beliefs, thus leaving the organization essentially unchanged by the efforts of reformers. The challenge to reformers is to channel this adaptive ability and develop organizations that have the ability to learn and change continually to improve themselves.

Those who seek to describe the learning organization use the symbols of broccoli, cauliflower, and ferns, emphasizing the unifying aspect that "the dominant shape . . . can be seen even in the individual elements" (Wheatley, 1992, p. 82). These symbols help to describe the organization, but the key to reform may be in knowing how to create one. Educational reformers armed with processes and strategies need to know how to apply these skills so that the adaptive nature of educational systems does not negate them.

Throughout this study and throughout the literature, people referred to the "messiness" of change. The data in this study support the notion that perhaps this process is not as messy as it appears. Just as chaos theory suggests the existence of a structure where there was thought only to be chaotic and random happenings, so might a similar structure exist to make sense of the seemingly messy nature of the change process. If reformers are to manage change, they must have some sense of structure. "Without that causal chain, we shall have no social technology of implementation" (Huberman, 1992, p. 11). Corporate managers typically would not manage a project without plans, charts, and journals, yet many claim to manage educational change all the time without any such tools. Those who manage change must be able to map it out. A teacher has lesson plans; a principal has a 3-year plan; those who manage change should have a counterpart.

Margaret Wheatley (1992) beautifully describes deterministic chaos as "created by iterations in a non-linear system, information feeding back on itself and changing in the process" (p. 125). In the field of computer science, iteration is a method of processing in which a process is repeated, with or without feedback, until its goal is achieved. The advent of more powerful computers and computer languages enabled the use of recursion, an alternative to iteration that significantly simplifies the appearance of the process. Whereas a recursive process appears to be simple but powerful, an iterative redesign of a recursive process can "look like a dish of spaghetti" (Horowitz & Sahni, 1984, p. 23).

Iteration implies the completion of one cycle before another begins. Recursion allows one cycle to suspend temporarily while another instance of the cycle is initiated, one which is critical to the successful completion of the first. Once the second cycle is completed, the first cycle continues to completion. Though this description only involves two levels, recursion can go much deeper, yet at each level, the successive levels must be completed in order for the previous levels to continue. Conceptually, the difference is whether one starts with the parts and builds to the whole, as with iteration, or whether one starts with a vision of the whole and builds the necessary parts, as with recursion. This perspective may be essential to building learning organizations.

Recursive mapping of the consulting process may allow consultants to explain their work in a meaningful way and thus better prepare their clients to perform as internal facilitators and to be patient with the process, seeing that the results at the deepest levels will yield powerful and faster results in the end. It is interesting to note that when one uses a recursive algorithm to draw fractals on the computer, at first, while the computer is pushing the process to lower levels of recursion, the blank screen of the computer gives

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the appearance that nothing is happening; once the drawing begins, the fractal takes shape beautifully and quickly. In a recursive process, the planning takes place from the most global level inward to the most specific level, but the action takes place from the most specific level out to the most global level.

Although this study focused on the consulting process, this notion of recursion may be applied equally well to the change process and to organizational development. The reader should note that the researcher seeks to remove nothing from Margaret Wheatley's (1992) powerful theory of leadership, but only to add a subtly different perspective to the development process.

Peter Senge (1990) named the opening chapter of his popular book, The Fifth Discipline, after Archimedes' saying, "Give me a lever long enough . . . and single-handed I can move the world" (p. 13). A recursive approach to organizational change may be just that lever. Further research is warranted.

Implications for Consultants and Clients

The contextualized findings from this study may be used by consultants and their clients who, as partners, seek to bring about system-wide, substantive, second-order change that affects learning. In cases of similar context, the findings may transfer gracefully; in other cases, those who read these findings may view them as points of consideration.

External consultants, if selected and used properly, can be an extremely cost-effective way of achieving an administrator's goals for change. Conversely, the poor selection or use of a consultant can waste many dollars. Given that no guidelines or policies related to the use of consultants exist, school administrators are left to learn all they can about the consulting process from experience and what little research exists.

The findings in this study emphasize the importance of shared values. Although one important aspect of selecting a consultant is identifying the knowledge, skills, products, and track record of the consultant (Byrne, 1994; Champion et al., 1990), the findings of this study indicate that it may be equally important to enter into preliminary discussions to determine what the client and consultant believe about the practices of teaching, learning, and organizational change.

The findings of this study support the literature regarding the importance of the principal in school reform. In this study, it was often the principal who set the tone for reform and through spoken and unspoken messages supported the efforts of the consultant. Principals must establish a working relationship with the consultant and make the consultant "their own." The consultant in this study, in working with one of the sites, experienced the arrival of five new principals over the course of her work in the district. The findings in this study suggest that, in a principal's first year, a systems consultant working with the school needs to maintain contact with those already involved in reform and provide critical information to the principal to facilitate an easy transition. The consultant also needs to allow the principal the time and space to learn about the organization and become established as the instructional leader. Then, the principal will be better able to use the consultant effectively.

The findings in this study indicate that an internal facilitator coupled with the consultant can keep the reform initiative moving. The internal facilitator for a given initiative needs to work with the consultant to understand the next steps to be taken in the

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absence of the consultant. This working relationship becomes increasingly important when the consultant is not regularly and often on site. In this study, the role of internal facilitator was most important for district-wide and school-wide change and where organizational culture was weakest. Individual and teams of teachers motivated to bring about change in their classrooms utilized the consultant and carried out reform initiatives in her absence, eager to report what they had accomplished upon her return.

The findings in this study support the importance of the local context in bringing about reform (Guskey, 1995; Prestine & Bowen, 1993). Consultants and clients need a variety of strategies to work within the local context to achieve their goals. Two strategies that emerged from the data were the use of the different consulting models, consultant-as-voice and client-as-voice, and the use of recursive instances of the consulting cycle to deal with the effects of site-specific factors.

Implications for Further Research

Systems consultants are becoming increasingly important in school reform efforts, yet little is known about their work. Continued study in this area is warranted if schools are to make effective use of limited budgets. This study involved one consultant working in two of her client school districts. Continued research using the findings of this study may help to clarify further the effect of the site-specific factors on the work of the consultant.

Through the Researcher's Eyes

This study provided me with a wonderful opportunity to view the work of another consultant as an observer, rather than from my usual role of the consultant. The findings in this study challenged some of my own beliefs about the work of consultants. Most interesting to me, perhaps as a former computer scientist, was the identification of the recursive nature of the consulting process. I plan to continue to study this finding to see if it can have a positive impact on my work and the work of other consultants.

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